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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"People are becoming part of our group because they know we're doing good stuff."
– Carl Ehlers

See story page 9

ON THE COVER

Local artist Keley Salemi provided Cromell LIFE with this photo to wish a happy holiday season to all of our readers.

Courtesy photo

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Balancing business and music

Member of the Accounting Crows is also communications pro

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Despite the fact that both of his parents were musicians – mom Jeanne was a pianist and dad Peter played accordion – Mark Zampino's family didn't exactly encourage him to pursue a musical career.

"My parents at first wouldn't let me buy band equipment, even with my own money," said Zampino.

He was born in Hartford, grew up in Glastonbury and has lived in Cromwell since 1987. It was his brother who sparked his interest in music.

"My brother Pete is two years older than me. He was president of the freshman class in junior high school in Glastonbury and he was an entrepreneur. He did a battle of the bands, and because he was my brother, I got in free," Zampino recalled.

"I remember walking in and they were playing 'Light My Fire' by the Doors and it just floored me. It was so powerful. It was just a transforming experience."

He can't exactly name what it was that took place.

"It was more of a feeling. I can't translate what the feeling was," he said.

What he did know was that he wanted to do it, too. He started playing while he was still in school.

"It was fun. It was a way to make some money once in a while," he added.

Zampino played throughout high school and continued performing while he attended University of the Americas Puebla, about 100 miles east of Mexico City.

"There was a kid in the next building over who had an electric piano. I had never played an electric piano, but I started playing it. He said, 'How would you like to be in my band?'"

Zampino remembered the band that included three Mexican musicians as well as another from Chile.

"All of our parties were in Spanish. We became fast friends."

It was also a time for him to advance his musical knowledge and one of the other musicians taught him musical theory.

"I could play by ear. He tutored me. He taught me all my theory. Later, when I learned to play guitar, all that theory gave me an advantage," he said.

Their school year came to an unexpected end.

"Our school got closed down when the socialist union took over the school at gunpoint. We sat up on the roof with binoculars [watching it]," Zampino said.

Returning to the United States, a fellow American musician tried to put together a band in New York.

"We bought the equipment we needed and headed to New York for the winter with the grand plan to come back to Connecticut in the summer to play full time. We were playing up there and making enough to survive until there was the blizzard of '77 or '78 and we lost all our gigs," he said.

"I came home with my tail between my legs."

Zampino stayed on track for a career as a musician. Once back in Connecticut, he got a call from Shaky Jake, who knew of him through a mutual friend.

"He was looking for a keyboard player. I had to audition twice before I got in. We played out a lot in Hartford, New Haven, in Fairfield County," Zampino said.

He also decided to go back to school at Manchester Community College.

"I decided I still wanted to get my degree. I realized that in music, you make it one of two ways. You either have a God-given voice or through incredible songwriting," he said.

"I had neither. I thought I could make some money and have fun with it while it lasts."

He continued to play, planning to pursue music as a livelihood, until he had an epiphany during a four-night engagement in Old Saybrook. The band members had taken turns renting a truck; one night, there was no truck. Zampino had a lot of equipment to transport, including a Moog synthesizer and Hammond organ.

"I was looking at this as a job, and as a job, it was no good. There were crazy hours. There were no benefits. You can't depend on your co-workers. And I thought I'm done with it," he said of the decision made when he was 22 or 23 years old.

Courtesy photos

Mark Zampino has been balancing his love of music with a communications career for decades.

He graduated summa cum laude from the University of Hartford where he eventually became an adjunct professor of business communication. He also found a day job and has spent more than three decades as public affairs director of the Connecticut Society of Certified Public Accountants, based in Rocky Hill.

He is responsible for overseeing internal and external communications as well as working on governmental affairs and is an instructor for CTCPA's continuing education department on topics such as business communication and public speaking.

He serves on the Cromwell Zoning Board of Appeals and is a past president of the Connecticut Valley Chapter of the Public Relations Society of

America. But that doesn't mean he left his musical life behind.

"I always wanted to have a studio in my house. As I worked on a real job, I have a studio in the house and I still make music for fun. It was on a casual level until 20 years ago," Zampino said.

"In 1996 we were putting together a conference for high school kids. We thought, wouldn't it be cool if we could put together a band of CPAs."

One by one, he found musicians who were willing to join.

"There was one catch. They said, 'You have to be the keyboard player.' I was blackmailed or coerced into doing it. That was 20 years ago," he said.

The Accounting Crows consists of Alan Friedman on lead guitar and vocals, Mike Fortunato on drums and percussion, Reed Risteen on bass guitar and lead vocals and Zampino on keyboards, guitar and lead vocals.

They played everywhere from Cromwell to Phoenix, San Diego, Tampa, Orlando, Boston and Providence. The band was featured in a "Rhymes with Orange" comic strip, where artist Hilary Price mentioned Zampino by name.

They feature classic rock such as the Beatles, Cream, the Monkees, Jimi Hendrix and Joe Walsh.

"These guys are all heavy hitters," Zampino said. "Virtually every time I play out with them, I think we have great gigs. There's something about the synergy of the four people that's greater than the sum of the parts. It's synergistic and we always have a blast."

"There's something about the synergy of the four people that's greater than the sum of the parts."

– Mark Zampino

Friedman has known Zampino for 30 years.

"Mark is great because, like so few of us, he walks both sides of the fence, both the business side and the creative side. On the business side, he is very, very powerful in his ability to communicate. He really commands the respect of the audience when he's speaking, which he does in such a dignified and respected manner," he said.

"Then there's the other side of Mark that a handful of us get to see. He's not only a great keyboard player, but he's become a good singer, too. He plays an integral part in our band. He's very funny guy; he has a great sense of humor, too. When he's able to let his hair down, so to speak, what little he has left, he's really one of those people you just love hanging out with," Friedman said.

"He's very pragmatic in the sense that he's open to ideas, but he'll keep it within what is ultimately doable. That ranges from the songs we choose to play to the gigs we choose to accept," he added.

"He's sort of the even-keeled voice of reason. Mark really is that perfect balance between all of us. He's the best communicator of the band. We do a lot of business functions. He tends to be the emcee and there's a reason for that."

Zampino said the music can be a bridge when he's visiting college campuses. After a talk at Post University, he ended up chatting with a student who's also a musician.

"He recorded a cover of a Buddy Holly song and sent it to me. I think we'll end up working on something," he said.

Music also served as a way to communicate with his now-grown sons, Geoff and Danny, who he calls incredibly talented musicians. Despite the fact that he chose not to pursue music full time, music has always pursued him.

"Every great opportunity I've had in my life came to me; my phone literally rang," he said.

That included being a charter

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member of Little House with Joe Patrina of West Simsbury.

"We worked for months and got down I don't know how many of his original songs. He was really visionary. He wanted you to be really committed to it," he recalled.

He was involved with that band for about three-and-a-half years. Zampino was impressed with the volume of work that Patrina turned out.

"This guy is just prodigious. Every rehearsal, three new songs would come out of him," he said.

He admits he doesn't write as much as he'd like to write.

"I like pop, classic rock, stuff that has a good melody and intelligent lyrics, not that my lyrics are that intelligent. I'm really hunkering down. I have to do at least one CD of my own," he said.

He doesn't work on his music on any steady schedule.

"It could be five minutes to four hours on a weekend. I always pursue it as my release, my reward. Like yesterday, I had to do a final blowing of the leaves and mowing of the lawn; I cleaned the master bathroom and at 2:30 I went down to the studio and worked for a couple hours.

"My father was an engineer, and if you asked him, 'How do you relax?' he'd say, 'first I put my surroundings in order, then I can relax.' That probably speaks volumes about me," he said.

A good day in the studio is creating something that he would want to buy.

"That doesn't happen anywhere near as often as I'd like," he said.

Mark Zampino, left, is a founding member of the Accounting Crows. The other members are, from left, Mike Fortunato, Reed Risteen and Alan Friedman.

When he does put together that CD, he plans for his sons to play drums and bass on every song. Zampino, whose musical career has included playing with Corey Glover from Living Colour, bassist Doug Wimbish and drummer Jonathan Mover, doesn't regret the path he took.

"I wanted a middle-class lifestyle. I was not going to suffer for my art," he said.

"I guess the premise of the musical career is I've never tried to depend on it for income. There have been some very good years that have literally afforded me the income for my studio. On rare occasions I've mixed studio money with household money," he added.

"I've never depended on it for income and always viewed it as a relief and as a pleasure. On the one hand, I view it very much as a businessman and, on the other hand, I still feel like I'm 23 and absolutely have a great time. It's like pulling on a favorite pair of jeans." **CL**

Learn more at accountingcrows.com.

A community conversation

Town and schools address the national opioid addiction crisis

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Adults and children all over the country are becoming addicted to prescribed pain-killing drugs called opioids that their bodies continue to crave long after the time for treatment has ended. It's a growing challenge and Cromwell is taking action before it becomes a significant local problem.

That's why the police department and public school district teamed up to present a community conversation specifically addressing this issue the evening of Nov. 21 at the high school. Superintendent of Schools Paula Talty emphasized that the district is not seeing a major problem in this area – at least, not yet – but she wants to be proactive.

"The schools were approached by the Justice Department over the summer" to see if they wanted to run a program for the community, she said.

Police Chief Denise Lamontagne said the local ambulance service has already responded to 14 calls of opioid overdoses. Her officers are well aware of the issues and the fact that it exists here.

"There's a problem. It may not be you, but it may be a friend," the chief said. "I have seen this film and it is very impactful. No community is immune to this."

The evening's program started with a film about drug addiction entitled "Chasing the Dragon," created by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Federal Bureau of Investigation. It depicted the sometimes graphic stories of opioid addiction and offered a variety of data to support the contention that this is a growing problem across America.

One of those statistics states that 46,000 Americans die annually from drug abuse.

Half of these deaths can be blamed on opioids, a common ingredient in prescription painkillers.

There is no stereotypical opioid abuser. They can be young or old, rich or poor, male or female, of any race, religion or culture. Many of the victims come from good families and had a happy childhood. Real-life people who appeared in the film included a mother and a man who once earned a six-figure salary.

Another statistic indicated that 20 percent of all high school seniors have abused drugs at least once in their young lives. Most of them started with marijuana and moved on to something more potent.

One of the challenges with opiate-based painkillers is that they are extremely addictive. The other is their cost. Physicians are aware of this and most only prescribe a short-term regimen.

But the addiction is, in many cases, already in place and the user is left to experience horrible withdrawal sickness, including vomiting and convulsions. Avoiding that sickness, combined with the high opioids provide, makes them want to continue use.

So they start buying drugs on the street that are laced with all kinds of other ingredients. Many move on to heroin because it is much less expensive. They crave the high and want to avoid withdrawal. The only way they see to accomplish those two goals is to keep using the drug.

The film described the current situation as the worst drug epidemic in U.S. history. Many police departments now carry Naloxone, more commonly called Narcan, an antidote that can literally save lives when people overdose.

After the movie, School Resource Officers Jason Tolton and Sarah Alicea addressed the audience in the cafeteria. They were joined by a pair of out-of-town colleagues, Officer Scott Plourde of the

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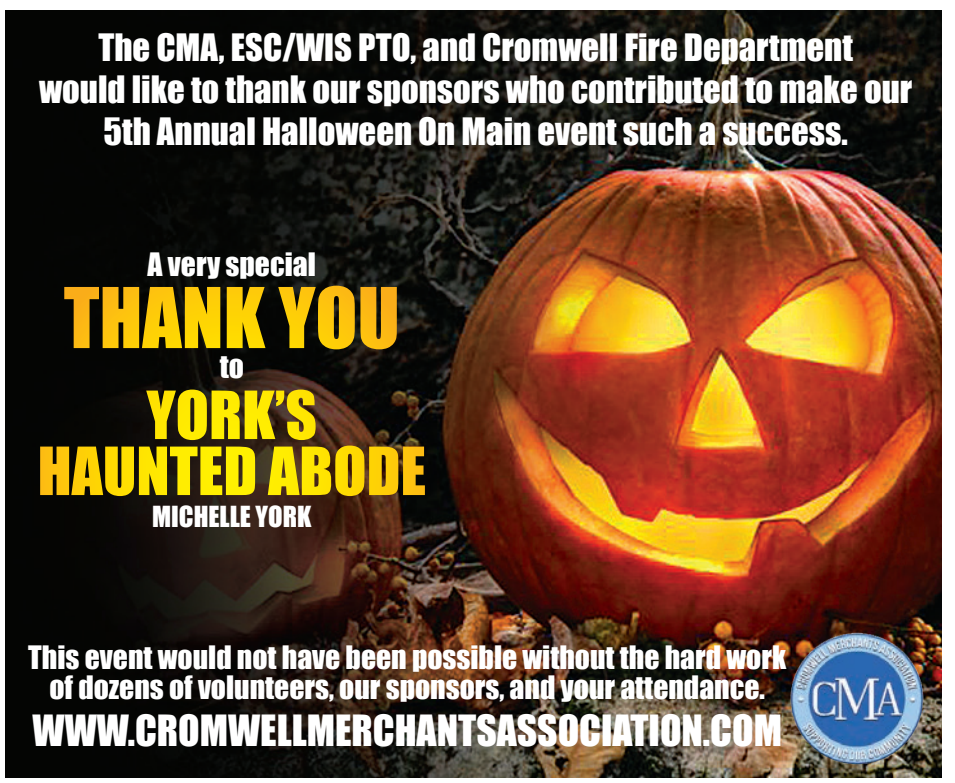
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Manchester Police Department and Officer Kevin Geraci of the South Windsor Police Department.

Both men are specially trained as drug recognition experts. One of their specialties is dealing with people who drive motor vehicles while high on drugs.

They explained that opioids act on the central nervous system to relieve pain. The most common types are oxycodone, hydrocodone, fentanyl and heroin. But overdoses are not limited to these four drugs.

"A lot of people start with marijuana and then they want to get a different high. An overdose can happen with anything" if the person exceeds the recommended dosage, Geraci said.

Plourde explained that Narcan is only a short-time fix. Hospital treatment is still required.

"Narcan focuses on opiate addiction. It doesn't work on any other drug," he said.

Lamontagne said the Cromwell Fire Department is scheduled to get Narcan in January and the police department hopes to add it to every officer's equipment later in the year. The ambulance service is part of the fire department.

Despite the fact that police and emergency medical personnel save lives with this medication, the people they save don't always appreciate the effort. They are in the middle of experiencing an extreme high and don't realize, or care, that it could kill them.

Heroin is purchased through illegal means and often is laced with other drugs or ingredients. It is particularly dangerous when mixed with the much more powerful fentanyl. That can require multiple shots of Narcan to overcome.

"Fentanyl is about 10 times more powerful than heroin. Manchester averages two deaths a month from opioid overdoses," Plourde said.

Geraci said fentanyl is produced in China and comes into the United States through Mexico.

Plourde added that, in his opinion, some physicians over-prescribe opioid painkillers and this often leads to addiction. Addicts will also go from one doctor to another seeking to collect multiple prescriptions.

Most doctors limit how much they prescribe because they understand the addictive nature of painkillers. But if the patient is already addicted, he or she will do whatever is necessary to feed that addiction.

They advised the parents in the audience to keep a close watch on any prescription medications in their homes. Teenagers will sometimes take these drugs to parties and mix them with other drugs in bowls. They then consume a handful of pills to see what results, often washing them down with alcohol and not even knowing what they are consuming.

"Alcohol is a mixer for everything," Geraci said.

There has been a steady rise in drug-related deaths in this state over the past five years. He cited statistics from the Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner indicating that by June of this year 445 Connecticut residents had died of drug overdoses. The youngest was a 17-year-old girl.

The two officers talked about and showed video of people under the influence of heroin. They are often "on the nod," meaning that they have great trouble staying awake. Their reactions are slow and they sometimes come close to tipping over.

Telltale signs of heroin use also include constricted pupils and raspy speech. All of this becomes a serious problem when they drive because they almost inevitably crash, Plourde said.

"Incarceration isn't the answer because they're not getting help while they're in jail," he said.

Superintendent Talty and Officer Tolton assured the parents in the audience that school staff know their students well and take action if they suspect a drug or alcohol problem. Other students will sometimes approach Tolton if they fear that a friend is heading down this dangerous path.

"Sometimes they start coming in disheveled," he said.

That's a telltale sign that something is wrong.

"Our teachers are really good at recognizing subtle changes in behavior," Talty said.

Three members of Narcotics Anonymous wrapped up the program. Two spoke about how they went down the road to addiction after taking prescription painkillers and how horrible their lives became. The third began drinking at age 10 and wound up a serious drug addict before recovery.

They found friendship and support in NA and realize how easy it is to slip back into past behaviors, so they work diligently to keep each other clean.

Help with addiction is available through Narcotics Anonymous. A local support group called All About Change meets every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. at Bethany Lutheran Church, 50 Court St. **CL**

For more information about NA and other area support groups call 1-800-627-3543 or see ctna.org.

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Photo by Mark Jahne

Rodney Bitgood and Cara Ehlers are the leaders of the Cromwell Merchants Association.

Promoting local business

Cromwell Merchants Association takes on a high-profile role in the community

by Mark Jahne
Editor

It started out small and quickly took off. The only question now is how big the Cromwell Merchants Association and its events will become.

The CMA was founded to represent historic downtown Cromwell and the merchants who have chosen to do business along Main Street and the surrounding area. They hold regular meetings, open to the public, and sponsor such annual events as the Memorial Day Car Show, Townwide Tag Sale, Mayor's Ball and Halloween on Main.

The goal is to increase awareness, visibility and viability for the downtown area and to promote the town as a wonderful place in which to live, work, shop, dine and otherwise prosper.

Volunteers are encouraged to come forward to help with these community events. Donations and sponsorships are always welcome so that these events can be offered with free admission.

Rodney Bitgood of Cromwell Automotive and Cara Ehlers, branch manager of Liberty Bank on Berlin Road, are the co-leaders of the

"People are becoming a part of our group because they know we're doing good stuff."
– Cara Ehlers

nonprofit organization.

They recalled how Mertie Terry, the town's last first selectman before municipal government changed to a council/manager format, and Town Planner Stuart Popper approached the downtown businesses asking them to organize for the betterment of the community.

That directly led to the formation of the CMA.

"The first event we had was Halloween on Main. Mertie wanted to decorate downtown," Bitgood recalled. "That gave us the boost to stick with it."

That was five years ago. He became involved at the beginning. Ehlers signed on a year later, after Jay Polke, longtime local businessman who owns and operates Willowbrook Spirit Shoppe and is active in community affairs, encouraged her to become involved.

The organization has no staff. It is in the process of filing for official federal 510(c)(3) nonprofit status. Meetings are held twice monthly.

"It's strictly volunteers," Ehlers said.

"We do have our core members. As it's gotten bigger, different people have stepped in. We have a lot of support from Larry at the chamber," she added.

"Larry" is Larry McHugh, president of the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce. There is a Cromwell division within that regional organization. Bitgood and Ehlers are chamber members through their respective businesses.

They agreed that interest has grown steadily in the CMA. There is no official membership structure at present, but that may change.

"A lot of people can't commit to as much as we do," Ehlers said.

But many still help. The two leaders are grateful to everyone who provides sponsorship dollars and/or manpower.

"When it's time for an event or our sponsorship drive, they are right there," Bitgood said. "We are so lucky. Organizations like this are volunteer driven."

He added that he is both pleased and surprised at how quickly the association has evolved. He is delighted with the support they have received from town government, the police department and the school district.

For example, there were 110 student volunteers from Cromwell High School who helped out at Halloween on Main.

"Rodney and I do a lot for the organization and the town. The Halloween event put into perspective why we do this," Ehlers said.

"People are becoming a part of our group because they know we're doing good stuff," she added. "There's a mutual respect. We listen to everyone's opinion."

This year's fifth annual Halloween on Main drew 5,000 people, perhaps more, despite having to default to its secondary date after the original day was washed out by rain.

The duo looks forward to relaxing a bit during the winter before preparing for the next big event, the Memorial Day Car Show. That also serves as an opportunity to honor a deserving local military veteran.

As far as Bitgood is concerned, he will keep going as long as he continues to have fun. He and Ehlers have developed a friendship over the years and agree that they work well together.

"We balance each other out," she said.

They are each involved in other activities and credit CMA with helping that happen. **CL**

To learn more visit cromwellmerchantsassociation.com. Contact Bitgood at 860-670-1620 or rodney@cromwellautomotive.com or Ehlers at 860-790-0532 or cehlers@liberty-bank.com.

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Student of the month

Woodside pupil is already running a strong campaign

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Nicholas Cordone may only be 10 years old, but he's already set some big goals for himself.

"I want to go to Yale and then work at NASA," the Woodside Intermediate School student said.

In addition to that career path, Nick is also planning on a future in politics. Although he is only in fifth grade, he has already started making strides in the political world.

This year, Woodside participated in Connecticut's Kid Governor, a statewide civics program created in 2015 to allow fifth-graders across the state to showcase their leadership skills.

"I want to be a governor when I grow up," Nick said. "It was a good experience to learn about the government."

The first step in the process was for students to pick a platform and prepare speeches to deliver to their class.

"My platform was on recycling and how it would be so cool for schools to have school gardens that we could use for our lunches every day," Nick said. "I was thinking we could put a couple more recycling bins in classrooms and outside by the playground and on buses."

After delivering his speech, he was elected as the winner. After that, the class worked with him to create a campaign video.

"The whole class helped," Nick said. "We rewrote the speech and we got props. Some people were location scouts, some were scene directors, and we made a video."

The winners from each fifth grade classroom presented their videos and students once again voted. Nick was elected the winner for the entire school, entering his video submission into a pool of more than 140 other fifth grade representatives from across Connecticut.

While he enjoyed the process, he did not think much about going further in the competition. So he was surprised to find out that his video was chosen by the Connecticut Public Affairs Network as one of the top seven candidates in the state.

"Honestly, I didn't think I was going to make it to the top seven, especially in the first year that our school did it," Nick said.

Seeing him go as far as he did was a point of pride for his school.

"Nick's success in our Connecticut's Kid Governor election simulation helped us to see his

"I want to be a governor when I grow up."

– Nick Cordone

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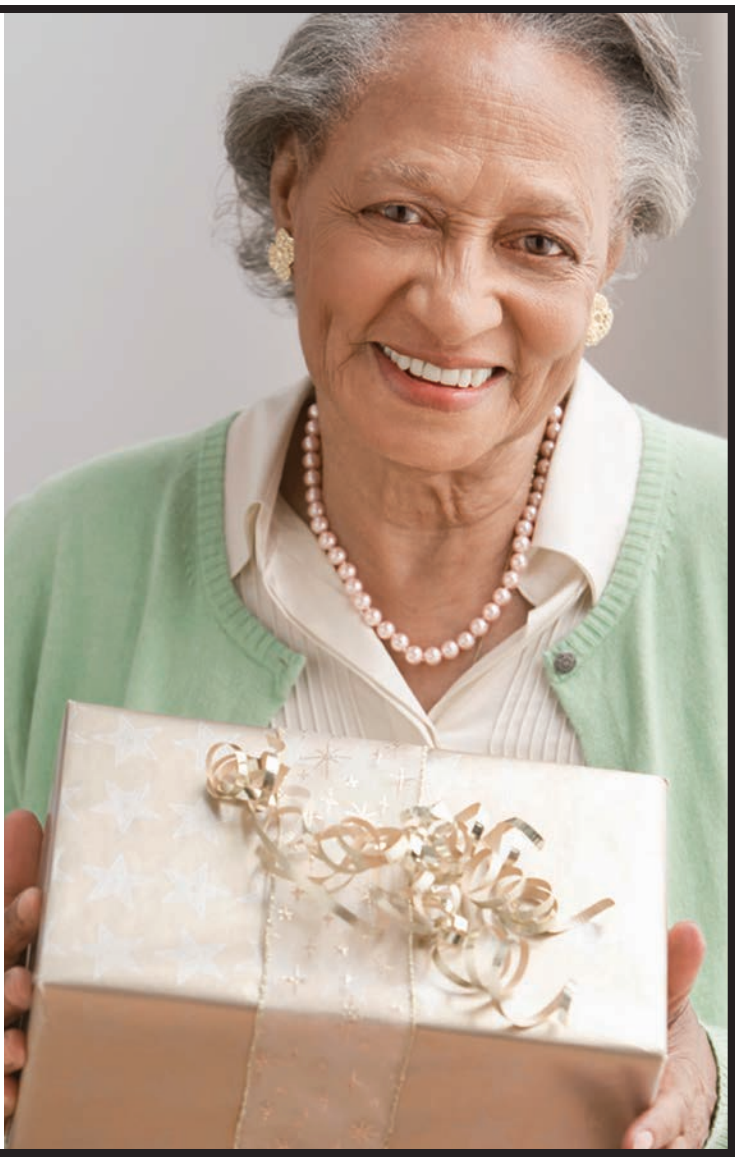

leadership qualities and great personality," Woodside Principal Chris Butwill said. "We are so proud of the success he has achieved by becoming one of the top seven finalists in the state."

Although he was not the ultimate winner, Nick was thrilled to have made it to the final round. He has been invited to attend the Kid Governor inauguration ceremony in January along with the other top contenders.

He hopes to continue fighting for the environment, as he did in his platform, by promoting recycling wherever he can.

"There are the facts about what happens when we don't recycle. Scientists are saying the North Pole is going to melt in 40 or 50 years," he said. "How is this going to affect me and my family and my friends in the future?"

Science has always been a special interest for Nick, who enjoys learning about chemistry when he can. He and his classmates are studying light waves in his science classes at Woodside.

"We're figuring out how light bounces off walls and how shadows are made," he said.

Outside of school, Nick likes to stay active by playing football and basketball through the town. He has been part of the Cromwell Lions football team for four years and is in his first year playing for the Cromwell Rebels basketball team.

"I like the competitive aspect of sports," he said.

He is also part of his school's Math League as well as the Boy Scouts.

"My dad was a Boy Scout when he was a kid and I thought it would be fun to go on the hikes and go camping," said Nick, now in his fifth year of scouting.

He enjoys spending time with his family, including his older sister Gina, as well as his pets, two dogs named Norman and Logan and a two-foot-long bearded dragon named Sonic.

While Nick enjoys all of his extracurricular activities, his schooling is the most important aspect of his life, and he is grateful to be able to learn in an environment like Woodside.

"School is very important to me," he said. "I think it's good that I'm getting my education in a safe environment where I can be helped if I need it and enriched if I need it." **CL**

Ten-year-old Nick Cordone ran for Connecticut's Kid Governor and placed as one of the top seven candidates out of more 140 in the state.

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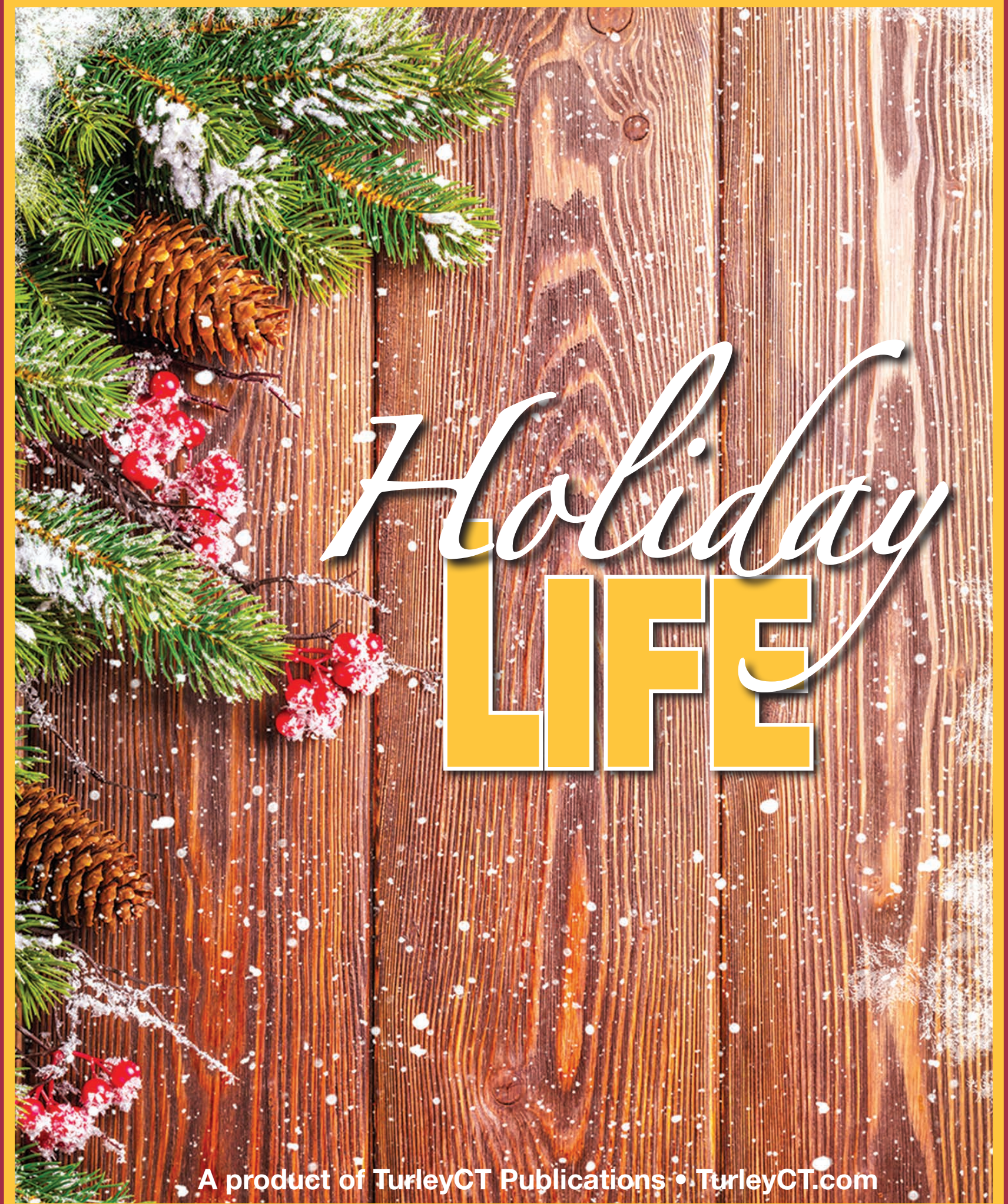
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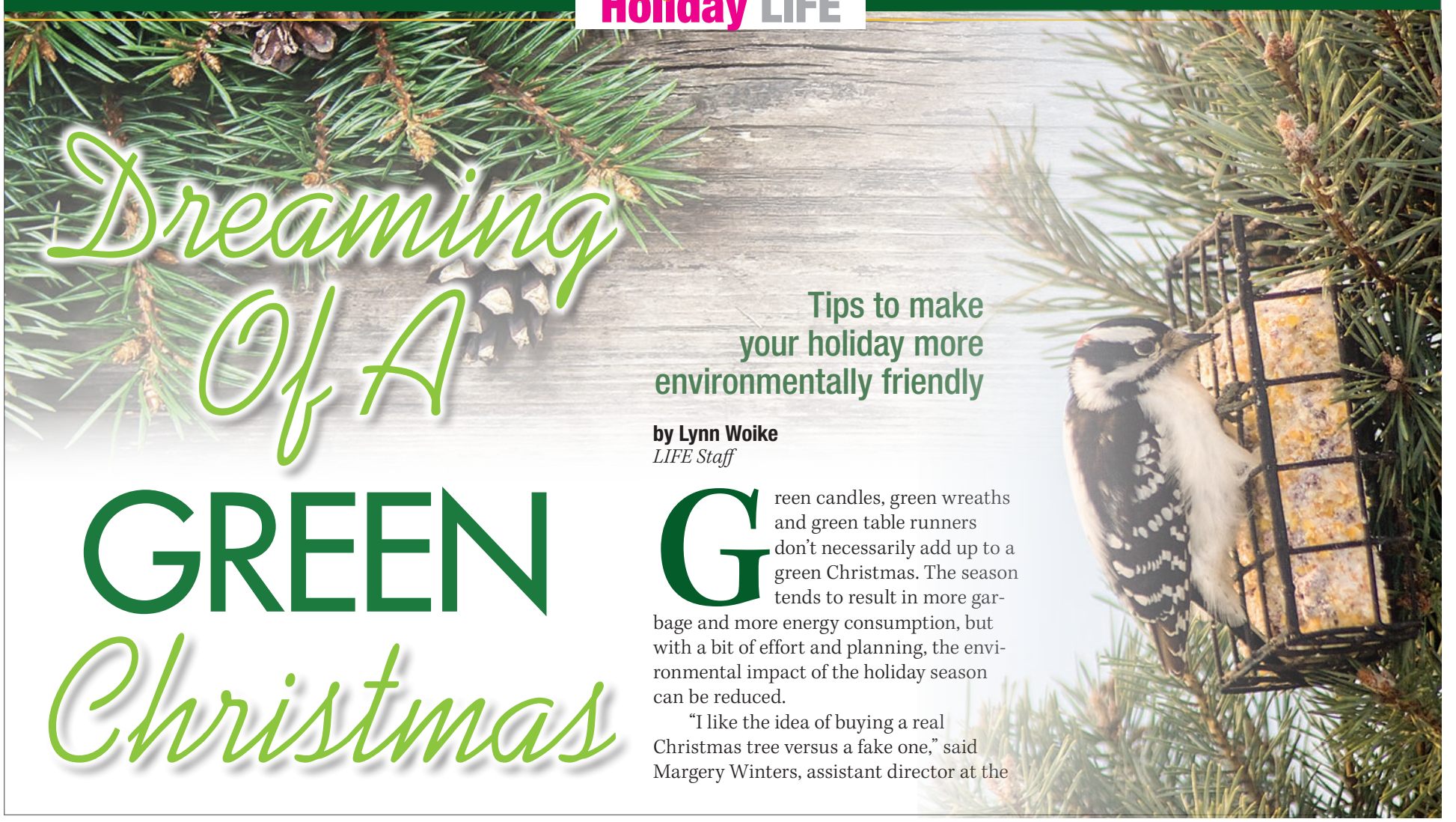

Dreaming Of A GREEN Christmas

Tips to make your holiday more environmentally friendly

by Lynn Woike
LIFE Staff

Green candles, green wreaths and green table runners don't necessarily add up to a green Christmas. The season tends to result in more garbage and more energy consumption, but with a bit of effort and planning, the environmental impact of the holiday season can be reduced.

"I like the idea of buying a real Christmas tree versus a fake one," said Margery Winters, assistant director at the

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Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton, adding, "It smells better and it's more in keeping with the season."

Christy Page, assistant park naturalist at Westmoor Park in West Hartford also advocates for live trees, saying, "They are a renewable resource, and the Christmas tree farms provide bird and animal habitats throughout the years as the trees grow to useable size."

"There's something special about giving your time."

– John Calandrelli

LED lights are more energy efficient, which is more eco-friendly, Winters said.

She also suggested pruning other evergreens, including holly and ivy, to bring inside and use as decorations during the Christmas season.

To prevent any bugs from coming in with pine cones, she suggested putting them in a 150-degree oven for 30-60 minutes.

"Keep it simple," Winters said. "Use less plastic and more natural materials."

When the dropping needles signal it's time to take down the tree, Winters said she likes to dismantle the tree with pruning shears and use the branches as mulch in her garden to keep the ground cold and the perennials from popping up prematurely if the temperature rises.

Every year, Kasha Breau, the lead teacher naturalist at Connecticut Audubon Society, Center at Glastonbury, puts her Christmas tree up outside instead of inside.

She decorates a small evergreen tied to a post with cold-weather ornaments for the birds, such as bagel slices covered with peanut butter and dipped in birdseed, and kabob-like decorations using fresh cranberries, pieces of apple, grapes and orange slices.

"You can use the green floral wire" to hold the food, forming a loop at the bottom so it does not fall off, and hanging it on a branch. When the fruit has been eaten, you can remove the wire, wipe it off, put on more food and rehang it, making your tree different every time. Slices of apple and oranges can also be hung with string or wire.

"It makes your tree a really friendly place," she said.

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Holiday LIFE

It doesn't have to be an evergreen tree, Breau said, noting that bird-friendly ornaments can be hung from any tree, and lights can also be added.

"That way there's no mess of a tree in the house, no needles falling off. ... It's something a little bit different," she said.

"Instead of giving a lot of 'stuff' at Christmas," Peter McKnight, a member of the Connecticut Sierra Club who works in West Hartford, suggests "giving a donation to an eco-friendly organization or to a group you know the recipient supports."

Page echoed that suggestion.

"Donate to something good on behalf of someone – there are a lot of organizations that have ways to 'gift' someone by donating in their name. Find an organization that fits the passions of the person you are trying to buy for, and use the amount you would have spent on a physical gift to donate in their name instead," she said.

If it seems an envelope is not enough to open, McKnight advocated for adding "something small, useful and consumable that won't end up in a landfill," such as soap made at a local farm or a mini loaf of bread.

John Calandrelli, Connecticut Sierra Club's local program manager, avoids Black Friday "at all costs," calling it the most important step to having a greener Christmas.

Rather, he said, "Give of yourself" to family and friends. "There's something special about giving your time: you don't know how much of it you have and once it's gone, you can't get it back.

"Promise them one back rub or take them to ride a horse or take them ice skating. Your time and caring are more important than anything you can give them. If they like to open something on the holiday, you can wrap your giving in a box or envelope. Your gift will keep giving after the holiday craziness is long gone."

Page likes giving "adventures instead of gifts," such as certificates for a shared experience such as camping, hiking, canoeing, or even going to see a movie together.

Cheri Collins, coordinator at the Wethersfield Nature Center, said, "One thing that people have been doing in recent years, that I like and have done as well, is instead of using paper, to buy some really nice fabric to wrap gifts in."

The fabric can be reused to wrap future gifts, or, if a dish towel or scarf were chosen, they can become usable gifts as well.

"I like to hand make gifts for people," she said.

In addition to handmade and home-baked items, she likes to give herbs and other plants to friends.

"Rosemary is easy to root," she noted.

For Doug Jackson, a park naturalist at Westmoor Park, a green Christmas is a part of green living. However you define it, 'green' is a more simple lifestyle that reduces "the amount of things we consume," he said.

"If you have been in the habit of making extensive light displays during the holiday season, then scale it down in size. ... For family travel plans, be intentional about how much driving you do during the holidays. ... Make your home as energy efficient as possible, in as many areas as possible: heating, lighting, etc.," Jackson said.

That way, eco-friendly efforts will extend into the new year. **CL**

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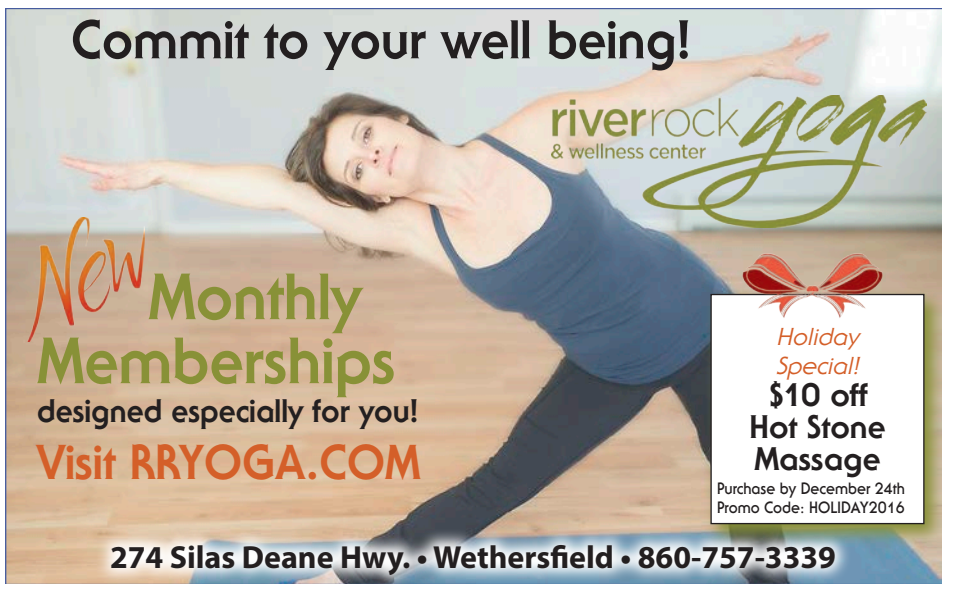

Holiday FAVORITES

From our... recipe files ...to yours

Our favorite recipes for the holidays or other days

The holidays are a time of giving, and of creating special meals for family and friends. With that in mind, staff members at TurleyCT Community Publications are sharing some of our very favorite recipes, delicious at the holidays or any time of the year.

Italian Anise Cookies

Ingredients:

3/4 cup sugar
1 stick butter
2 large eggs
1/4 cup milk
1 teaspoon anise extract
2 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
2 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon fine salt

Directions:
Heat oven to 325 degrees. Coat baking sheets with non-stick spray.
Beat first five ingredients on low speed. Beat in the next three ingredients until blended. Drop rounded teaspoons of dough onto the cookie sheets about 2" apart. Bake 10 to 12 minutes until golden on bottom. Cool on a wire rack. Dip tops in glaze (below).

Glaze: Combine one cup confectioner's sugar, 4 to 5 tsp. milk and a tsp. of anise extract. After glazing, top with a sprinkle or colored sugar of your choice.

Patty Ewert, one of our account executives, shared this recipe for easy Italian anise cookies. She said they're great for the holidays.

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Holiday LIFE

Chocolate Truffles

Ingredients:
1/2 pound bittersweet chocolate
1/2 pound semisweet chocolate
1 cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons orange-flavored liqueur (optional)
1 tablespoon prepared coffee
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
Confectioners' sugar
Cocoa powder

Directions:
Chop the chocolate finely with a sharp knife. Place in a heat-proof mixing bowl.
Heat the cream in a small saucepan until it just boils. Turn off the heat and allow the cream to sit for 20 seconds. Pour the cream through a fine-meshed sieve into the bowl with the chocolate. With a wire whisk, slowly stir the cream and chocolates together until the chocolate is completely melted. Whisk in the orange flavored liqueur, if using it, and the coffee and vanilla. Set aside at room temperature for one hour.
With 2 teaspoons, spoon round balls of the chocolate mixture onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Roll each ball of chocolate in your hands to roughly make it round. Roll in confectioners' sugar, cocoa powder or both.
These will keep refrigerated for weeks, but serve them at room temperature.

This recipe, involving chocolate and sinfully good, comes from Alicia B. Smith, our associate editor.
"Growing up my family had several holiday traditions – cutting our own tree, our cardinal bird, midnight mass – but none of them related to food. When I got married, I was determined to carry on some of the traditions I had enjoyed while also incorporating those from my husband's family. That's why we have an enormous tree stuffed into our living room and I make bacon wrapped scallops to enjoy while we decorate said tree. One year I decided that we needed chocolate, because why not? This recipe was from an episode I saw on the Food Network and thought it would be the perfect thing. They are messy to make, but delicious to eat!

When we decorate the tree we feast on the scallops and the truffles and my husband serves as bartender whipping up a mean Manhattan, or for an interesting flavor treat maybe a Hooker Chocolate Truffle from the Hooker Brewing Company, based in Bloomfield.

Here's a meat pie recipe from Mark Jahne, editor of Newington LIFE, Rocky Hill LIFE, Cromwell LIFE and Wethersfield LIFE.
My mother (Theresa) likes to cook this traditional French-Canadian holiday meal for Christmas and New Year's Day. Tourtiere – also called meat pie or pork pie – is classic winter comfort food. The following is a recipe for two pies.

Tourtiere

Ingredients:
2 pounds ground pork
2 medium onions, chopped and mashed
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cloves
1 teaspoon allspice
Double crusts for two 9-inch pies

Place all ingredients in a large pot and add enough water to cover about three-quarters of the ingredients. Simmer, stirring frequently, for about 30 minutes. Adjust seasonings to taste. Divide the mixture between two pastry-lined 9-inch pie plates. Cover the top with pastry crust and make slits in the top crust to allow steam to escape. Bake at 425 degrees for 10 minutes, then reduce the temperature to 375 and bake another 20 minutes, or until the pies are golden brown. Makes 8 to 12 servings.

Brandy (or rum) Balls

Ingredients:
1 box crushed vanilla wafers
(Nilla brand is best)
1 cup sifted confectioner's sugar
2 tablespoons cocoa powder
1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts (optional)
1/4 cup brandy or rum
1/4 cup light corn syrup

Directions:
Combine all ingredients. Add a little water — about 1 1/2 tablespoons — and form 3/4-inch balls. Roll in colored sugar and store in a tightly covered container.

The above is from the family recipe box of Glastonbury LIFE editor Nancy Thompson.
"Many came from people I haven't seen in years, but I think of them whenever I recreate their beloved recipes. Like Alicia's truffles, this is pretty messy to make, but oh, so good."

Holiday LIFE

Ornament stories

The holiday season is upon us, and with that comes a wide array of traditions. From handmade creations to pieces passed down through the years, these ornaments are part of the traditions for our staffers.

by Nancy Thompson

The decorations on our family's Christmas tree are a history of the past 47 years, but one ornament has a place of honor every year. When our children were little, we packed away the fancy breakable ornaments we'd bought in the past and decorated the tree with what we thought were kid-proof baubles and doo-dads, including a couple of plastic foam ornaments designed to look like gingerbread cookies. Our son, then a toddler and a huge fan of Cookie Monster, thought the gingerbread boy was real and took a large bite out of its head. The ornament has broken in two a couple of times, been fixed badly at least once, and now is held together by a tongue depressor attached with tape on its backside, but we all love it and laugh when we remember the story.

Photo by Nancy Thompson

Photo by Allie Rivera

by Allie Rivera

Our family tree will never be pictured in Better Homes and Gardens. Amid the strings of tiny, brightly colored lights are always a strange assortment of mismatching ornaments stretching back through my parents' 37-year marriage. Also included are the homemade pieces my brother and I created and pictures of each of us through the years. Though I now live in Hartford and my brother is up in Boston, we still wait until the four of us are all together at my parents' home in Clinton to put all of the ornaments up. Unwrapping each individually packaged ornament is like opening Christmas presents early, and each one leads to the four of us reminiscing on various memories. This one is of my first Christmas. We have a similar one for my brother, and every year as we go through the ornaments with photos, we laugh at our outfits and faces. It typically takes us hours to decorate with the breaks to share stories and sing along to the radio, and looking back, I treasure those memories just as much as the ones we were laughing about.

Holiday LIFE

Photo by Abigail Albair

by Abigail Albair

Throughout my entire childhood, each year my parents and I would make the short trip from our home to Starkey's Tree Farm to select a tree for our living room. We would spend a Saturday evening watching the holiday classic "It's a Wonderful Life" and decorate the tree with an eclectic mix of ornaments – one from every spot we'd vacationed as a family, one to mark every anniversary and occasion, and several made by yours truly out of Popsicle sticks and sequins. When my husband and I were married, we brought to our first tree a collection of ornaments from our past. I retained the beautifully hand-crafted ornaments made for me by a high school friend's "memere," he kept his favorite Yankees' pieces and a few made for him by his father. Over the years, we added one for our dog, Bailey, one from our honeymoon and ones we collected on trips to Rome, Paris and London. This year, however, we add the most precious of all. Our son was born in April, and while we're certain to get at least a few traditional "Baby's First Christmas" ornaments to decorate the tree with this year, our favorite will likely always be this sparkling blue Mickey Mouse, customized with our son's name. His little four-month-old eyes grew wide with wonder during his first trip to the Happiest Place on Earth and we spent many minutes as he peacefully napped in his stroller searching through the Christmas shop in the Magic Kingdom for the perfect way to memorialize the trip on our tree. My hope is, one day, he will take it out each Christmas and smile. He will never remember that first vacation with mom and dad, but we will certainly never forget.

by Lynn Woike

I celebrate Yule with an evergreen tree adorned only with natural objects. Many are stars and there are some shells. This ornament is both – a starfish with two shells, a piece of beach glass, a bit of fabric and some ribbon. I got it 15 years ago on Chebeague Island, Maine. During a difficult time in my life, I visited there several times, and bought it from a local artist there. Every year when I unpack this ornament, I unpack the memories of the sun, the sand and the smell of the salt water. Sometimes, like last January, when the tree is taken down, this ornament does not get put down in the basement with the other decorations; it finds a place to hang where it brings back the memories of the healing time spent in that safe harbor. **CL**

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Events spotlight

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The Cromwell Fire Department will drive emergency vehicles decorated for the holidays throughout the town, visiting as many streets and homes as possible. Santa Claus will be on board a fire truck and available for photos. Candy canes will also be distributed. Firefighters will be collecting new and unwrapped toys for Cromwell Social Services to distribute to families in need, as well as items for the town's food bank and financial donations for its fuel bank.

Old Church Concert Series

Jan. 20, 7 p.m.
Rocky Hill
United Methodist Church
623 Old Main St., Rocky Hill
oldchurchconcerts.com

This concert series returns with multiple performances scheduled for the new year. The concept is to showcase the wealth of original music and singer/songwriters in this area. First up are Robert Fullerton, Richard Neal and Kenn Morr. Admission is a free-will donation. Other concerts for 2017 are scheduled for Feb. 17, March 17, April 21 and May 19. Further shows will be added in September, October and November.

Comfort Food Dinner

Jan. 28, 5:30 p.m.
Rocky Hill
Congregational Church
805 Old Main St., Rocky Hill

Chapin Hall is the location of this dinner that features salad, rolls, vegetables, meat loaf, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, ham, soda, coffee, tea and desserts. The meal will be followed by the Magic of Michael Michaels. Call Jeannie Alessi at 860-839-1321 for reservations. The cost is $10 for adults, $5 for ages 4-12, free for children younger than 4, and a family cap of $35.

Cromwell government agencies, schools, businesses, clubs, churches and all other civic organizations are invited to send us their upcoming events for inclusion in events spotlight and/or the community calendar. We also welcome people notes and news briefs for news roundup. You can send them to us at mjahne@turleyct.com or Cromwell LIFE, 540 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, CT 06070.

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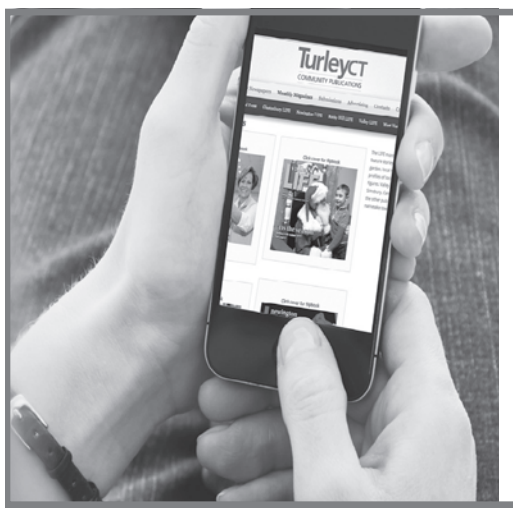

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Slice of LIFE

photos by Mark Jahne

Cookies and Trees

1. Pastor Scott Jones and his wife Robin played host to the many shoppers at Hilltop Convenant Church. This is the sale's eighth year and proceeds will go to support the church youth group. **2.** Greeting people at the main entrance and passing out shopping baskets are, from left, church volunteers Carolyn Johnson, Jordyn Pekarovic and her twin sister Nicole, and Noah Hallden. **3.** Members of the Cromwell Fire Department held their annual Christmas tree and wreath sale the first few weekends of December until the supply ran out. Shown with one of the freshly cut trees are, from left, Krissy Gish with son Joshua Gish, Amanda Hinds, Capt. Robert Donohue, Robert Hinds of the Fire Police and Deputy Chief Michael Salonia. **4.** Grace Michaud and Lily David are excited over the goodies they found. **5.** Hilltop Covenant Church held a cookie walk the morning of Dec. 3. The aisles were filled with freshly baked treats. **6.** It was difficult to maneuver up the main aisle at times because there were so many shoppers looking for their favorite kind of cookies.

News roundup

Village supports Operation Christmas Child

Seniors citizens and staff members at Covenant Village of Cromwell packed, wrapped and delivered 124 shoeboxes filled with toys, toiletries and school supplies to Shiloh Christian Church in Middletown for Operation Christmas Child.

From there, the shoeboxes are headed to a fulfillment center in Minneapolis, where they will join millions of others to be shipped globally to children living in poverty or areas affected by war, disease, or natural disaster.

Operation Christmas Child is a program started in 1993 by Samaritan's Purse, a humanitarian organization. It was selected by Covenant Retirement Communities, Covenant Village of Cromwell's parent company, as an organization-wide effort to bring joy and improve lives of children this holiday season.

Shown are back, from left, Maria Minkos, health care administrator; Kim Fiore, sales representative; Maryann Trocchio, director of assisted living; Gail Fancher, director of human resources and Cheryl Lewis, receptionist; front, from left, Alyssa Pagan, administrative director; Amanda Slack, sales assistant; Erin Hall, sales director; the Rev. Mary Miller, chaplain; Cindy Harrigan, director of community life and Pamela Klapproth, executive director.

Knights thank supermarket

The Cromwell Knights of Columbus, Council 6, held its annual Tootsie Roll Drive outside the local Super Stop & Shop from Oct. 7-8. Customers and employees helped the Roman Catholic fraternal organization raise more than $2,500 to support programs that help people with developmental disabilities.

The council donates about 20 percent of the funds to Special Olympics while the remaining 80 percent stays in town split among MARC Community Resources, Camp Sunrise, Manes in Motion and the Miracle Baseball League. Knight and Tootsie Roll Chairman Tony Gumkowski, left, presents Stop & Shop Manager Mark Digilarmo with a Thank You Award.

Knights thank supermarket

Ädelbrook receives grant

Ädelbrook Behavioral and Developmental Services received a $868,110 grant through the State Office of Policy and Management's Nonprofit Grant Program on Nov. 22. The money will be used to fund the installation of a secure electronic health records system.

It will measure and improve mental and behavioral health outcomes for children and young adults with autism spectrum disorders and other neurodevelopmental disorders who are served by Ädelbrook.

This type of system increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of best practices in regard to clinical and therapeutic methods. It will provide real-time information about all aspects of each child and young adult's clinical progress across the continuum of care.

This allows everyone working with the individual to see up-to-date clinical notes and behavioral plans. It will bring Ädelbrook's clinical practices closer to a paperless model, which saves time, paper, money and natural resources.

It also allows for better sharing of data with state agencies tracking the progress of the children they support. **CL**

Cromwell government agencies, schools, businesses, clubs, churches and all other civic organizations are invited to send us their upcoming events for inclusion in events spotlight and/or the community calendar. We also welcome people notes and news briefs for news roundup. You can send them to us at mjahne@turleyct.com or Cromwell LIFE, 540 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, CT 06070.

Village supports Operation Christmas Child

LIFE in the classroom

Teaching students to become digital citizens

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

Walking through the halls of Woodside Intermediate School, students can be seen carrying an extra tool around with them in addition to books and pencils. This year the school implemented a one-to-one laptop computer program, providing each student with a school-issued device to use during the day.

"Every class has a dock and every student has an assigned computer that they care for for the entire year," technology and STEM leader Dan Delia said. "They carry it with them during the day, then it stays in the classroom overnight."

The increase in technology use within the classroom is happening nationwide. Delia tributes the changes in large part to the necessity of technological skills in the years to come.

"That's where the careers are going to be in the future," he said. "They're now saying there's going to be a minimum of one million jobs when these kids graduate that don't exist yet."

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Delia added that most of the students in the school, which educates grades 3-5, are used to living in a world where this kind of technology is ever present.

"For kids at this age, technology is not a privilege, it's a right," he said. "They expect to have Wi-Fi wherever they go."

He works with all of the school's more than 400 students. Delia co-teaches with classroom teachers on incorporating technology as well as teaches his own courses in digital citizenship, coding and computer skills.

That aspect of digital citizenship is the first piece taught to students in their technology classes because he believes it is extremely important.

"Teaching the kids to be safe online and be responsible with technology is so important in this day and with what's going on in the world. They have to know how to be safe," he said. "I take that personally as both a father and a teacher."

At the beginning of the year, students in every classroom created and signed a digital constitution, outlining the proper behavior that is expected of them. From there, classes with Delia focus on responsibility on the Internet, plagiarism, and the difference between personal information and private information.

"For kids at this age, technology is not a privilege, it's a right. They expect to have Wi-Fi wherever they go."

– Dan Delia

"I care for each and every one of these kids," he said. "This teaches the children responsibility, not just in taking care of the computers, but knowing how to handle themselves."

In addition to learning how to navigate in a digital world, he also focuses his classes on computer skills and coding and works to show other teachers in the school how they can best utilize this technology to enhance learning.

"The technology is a tool. It does not replace the teacher," Delia said. "I can't say enough about how welcoming the staff is here. We work as a team to make this happen."

The technological updates have been beneficial for the teachers as well as the students. He said many teachers now have the ability to write on a tablet computer that is then projected onto the front board, freeing them up to walk around the room and spend less time with their back to the class as they write.

The school is also beginning to utilize the Google for Education suite that allows students and teachers to communicate more effectively, as well as assign and complete work digitally.

"It's really positive for education on every level," Delia said.

Principal Christopher Butwill is pleased with the progress that has been made since the beginning of the academic year.

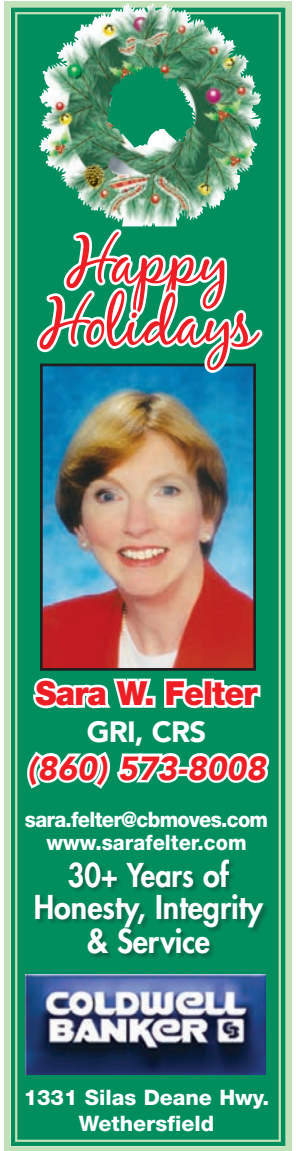
"It has been wonderful to see technology become integrated into daily instruction at WIS," he said. "When I visit classrooms, I am very impressed by the ways that students and teachers are using this powerful tool."

Delia said it is due to the support of Butwill, Woodside teachers, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Paula Talty and the community at large that the school has been able to make such strides.

"The community has been very supportive," he said. "With the community's support, we are meeting the needs of the children."

As the year continues, he is looking forward to finding more ways that technology can be used to enhance learning.

"Overall, it's been a wonderful experience," he said. "This tool is being used to help the children learn and grow as citizens." CL



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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

17 **Holiday Refreshments**, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Cromwell Belden Public Library, 39 West St., 860-632-3460 or cromwellct.com/library

Story and Craft, 11 a.m., for ages 4-8, registration required, Cromwell Belden Public Library

19 **Preschool Storytime,** 10:30 a.m., for ages 3-5, Cromwell Belden Public Library

21 **Rick Steves' European Christmas Travel Video,** 2 p.m., Cromwell Belden Public Library

Film "Polar Express," 6 p.m., Cromwell Belden Public Library

22 **Toddler Time,** 10:30 a.m., for ages 2-3, Cromwell Belden Public Library

27 **Babytime,** 10:30 a.m., for ages 1-23 months, registration required, Cromwell Belden Public Library

28 **An Engineer's Point of View Travel Video,** 2 p.m., Cromwell Belden Public Library

Mugs & More, 2 p.m., for ages 8 and older, registration required, Cromwell Belden Public Library

29 Llama Llama, 11 a.m., registration required, Cromwell Belden Public Library

30 **Marble Mazes,** 11 a.m., for ages 7-12, registration required, Cromwell Belden Public Library

Is your club, community organization, school or house of worship holding an event open to the general public? If so, please send us the details for inclusion in our calendar. Email your events to Mark Jahne at mjahne@turleyct.com or mail them to Turley CT Community Publications, 540 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, CT 06070.

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Editorial

Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season

It's that magical time of the year when people celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year's. The weather becomes a bit chilly and we start to see the snows of winter.

We all tend to rush around shopping, attending office and family gatherings, planning dinners, writing greeting cards and so much more. Did we mention shopping?

That's all fine, but this is also the season of good will toward others. Here are a few thoughts and suggestions to make the holidays a little bit more enjoyable for everyone.

Say hello when passing a stranger on the sidewalk. It can't hurt and you might even get a smile in return.

Drop a few dollars or your spare change into the Salvation Army kettle or give to the charity or charities of your choice. They are all heavily dependent upon holiday season giving to fund their activities throughout the year.

Offer to help a senior citizen carry heavy bags of gifts or groceries. Look over your shoulder when passing through a door and, if someone is behind you, hold it open for that person instead of letting it close in his or her face.

Give a box or can of food to the town food bank. There are people in need who would give anything to have the kind of holiday meals most people will enjoy.

Slow down on the roads and let the other car go first. We all tend to become assertive drivers, especially when the roads are busy. Take a deep breath and let someone else have all the stress.

Find the time to listen to some music, drink some cocoa, bake some cookies, spend quality time with others. Slow the rat race of the holiday season to more of a jog or, if possible, a walk.

Take the time to enjoy the lights, decorations and music. Look for little things you can do to make other people happy. Those little things can really add up.

The weather will become cold, dark and foreboding soon enough. Let's all celebrate the actual and spiritual light of this season while we can.

Turley CT Community Publications wishes all the best this holiday season to our readers and advertisers. We'll see you again in 2017.

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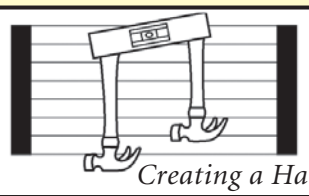

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BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]

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Typically one thinks of using a ceiling fan in the warmer months, as it creates a wind 'chill' effect – making it feel cooler in your home. This happens when the blades are traveling in a counter-clockwise direction. By using a fan in this manner, it helps save energy and money since you're able to raise the thermostat setting.

So clearly they are beneficial during the summer, but are you getting the most out of your ceiling fan during the winter months? Instead of letting them collect dust, put them to use!

Now regardless of season, warm air rises ... collecting near the ceiling. So when paying to heat your home, why not get that warm air back down closer to where we live? For the best efficiency when it's cold outside, the blades should travel in a clockwise direction (stand beneath the fan or lie on your bed and look up to determine which way they are spinning). Making this change re-circulates the warm air by creating an updraft, pushing it down the walls and back into the room at the same time. This happens without creating a cooling effect.

So if you don't have a ceiling fan, perhaps consider getting one... the energy savings can be significant, year-round. **CL**

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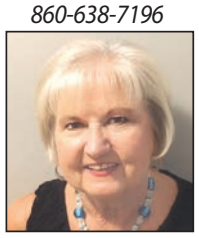
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